

Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 6, 2023

**Senate Bill 1157: AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT CONCERNING EMPLOYEES OF PUBLIC AGENCIES
- Support**

Senator Flexer, Representative Blumenthal, Senator Sampson, Representative Mastrofrancesco, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Stephaine Darden-Smith and I am a Disability Claims Specialist in the Disability Determination Services unit in the Department of Aging and Disability Services with over fourteen years of service. I offer the following testimony in support of Senate Bill 1157: An Act Concerning Revisions to the Freedom of Information Act Concerning Employees of Public Agencies:

I first would like to thank the committee for raising SB 1157. As someone who is an employee of the Disability Determination Services unit within the Department of Aging and Disability Services this is a bill that is very important to me. I love working for the people of Connecticut, but I would never want that work to put myself, my family, or my co-workers at risk because someone abused the FOIA process.

I would like to share with you an example of why this bill is so important and personal to me. There was a situation where I was at work and received a call from a consultative exam provider at 4:45 PM. He was checking to make sure I was safe. Earlier in the day he performed an exam on a claimant of mine, and during the exam the claimant told him that he had homicidal ideation and planned to kill me. He stated that he knew I was black and that he was going to drive over to where I work and sit outside and shoot every black female who walked out of the office. He had the address to the office from the disability letters mailed to him.

The consultative exam provider had notified the administration at Disability Determination Services, who called the State Police. The troopers were not able to locate the claimant at home and were looking for the claimant to investigate the threats, but the claimant was still at large when it was time for me to leave work.

I was upset that the administration had not notified me directly of the threat. When it was time to leave, I had ascertained that no black women in my office had been shot at or assaulted throughout the day, so I took my chances and left the building. Security did not escort me to my vehicle. It is a building with a gated parking lot and a security guard, but the parking lot is easily accessible from the street. I did not feel safe and did later speak with the administration regarding my disappointment in the way the situation was handled. It's bad enough that this individual knows where I work, I can't imagine what would happen or how I would feel if they got my residential address.

While it is true that personal information can be found in places other than a FOIA release - as we all know, sometimes all it takes is an internet search - that should not be an excuse for the state to help facilitate the release of that information. The open and transparent operation of state agencies is essential to our

democracy and at the foundation of the idea of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. However, that does not mean my home address needs to be accessible through a FOIA request. For my safety and security, as well as the safety and security of my family and co-workers, I urge you to support Senate Bill 1157.

Stephaine Darden-Smith